

**Public Meeting**  
**Reading LRA**  
**Thursday, June 11, 2009**  
**Seventh Day Adventist Church**

**LRA Members Attending:** V. Spencer, S. Marmarou, S. Fuhs, M. Ballas, E. Rafaelli

**Staff attending:** L. Kelleher, Point of Contact, E. Swiger, Swiger Consulting Group, B. Steinberg, Kutock Rock, K. Graybill

**Others Attending:** Mary's Shelter, Reading Hospital, Reading School District, Community Members

---

**Purpose**

Mr. Spencer called the meeting to order. He introduced the LRA members and Swiger Consulting team to the members of the community. He stated that after a short presentation on the BRAC process and an update on the creation of the reuse plan from Mr. Swiger and Mr. Steinberg, the three organizations who submitted NOIs will make a brief presentation on their proposed reuse. After the three presentations, community members may ask questions and provide input.

**Reuse Plan Update**

Mr. Swiger thanked the members of the Reading LRA, Ms. Kelleher along with the Navy for their assistance and accommodation. He stated that this group is one of the best their team has worked with. He stated that overall the creation of the reuse plan is on schedule; however, some new information that requires further review will cause a delay. He stated that Ms. Kelleher has drafted a letter requesting an extension from the OEA. Mr. Swiger introduced Attorney Barry Steinberg.

Mr. Steinberg described the composition of the consulting team. The consulting team brings together individuals with legal, planning, economic development, engineering, etc. expertise. He explained that the BRAC property disposal process began with an Act adopted in 1949 covering the disposition of unwanted federal properties. He described the "pecking" order for the reuse of federal properties. He stated that military and other federal uses are considered first. If

the federal government does not want the property, then public benefit conveyances are considered. If a public benefit/public conveyance (local government, medical, homeless, etc) reuse is selected, the property transfers at no cost. If an private development type of use (commercial, residential) is selected, the property transfers at fair market value. The party to whom the property is transferred for a public benefit conveyance must complete their project within a stated period of time or the property reverts back to the federal government.

Mr. Steinberg stated that the Reading LRA is considering the following three public benefit conveyance reuses:

- Reading Hospital - administration building or dormitory
- Reading School District - kindergarten and/or alternative education and storage
- Berks Women in Crisis/Mary's Shelter - temporary shelter for abused and/or pregnant homeless and administrative offices.

Mr. Steinberg stated that this second meeting will allow the community the opportunity to consider the proposed reuses and then analyze how those uses fit with the neighborhood. He described the difficulties this particular property presents. He stated that the main building was constructed in the late 1950's under federal standards. He compared the federal military standards to the current residential and/or commercial code requirements and the cost to bring the property up to current standards.

Mr. Steinberg also noted the need to remediate the lead and asbestos contamination at the property. He stated that the federal reports on the property show lead and asbestos contamination; however the contamination will not be abated by the federal government before the property is transferred. He stated that Ms. Kelleher inquired about the availability of funding to perform environmental testing to determine the levels of contamination and the remediation of the contamination; however, that request was denied by the federal government. BRAC properties are transferred "where is; as is". So in addition to bringing the property up to current local code, the party receiving the property will also need to remediate the lead and asbestos contamination.

When the Reading LRA considers the applications for the reuse of the property, they must also consider the financial ability of the receiving party to successfully cure the code, ADA and remediation issues, along with how the proposed reuse

will fit into the neighborhood. He also noted that this building, built to be a bomb shelter during the Cold War era, will also be costly to demolish. Mr. Steinberg stated that when the reuse plan is submitted to HUD, they will also need to ascertain if Reading has met the needs of the homeless community and if there is a bona fide need for the homeless applicants' intended use.

Mr. Swiger described the work to develop a community needs assessment, a facilities assessment and a market analysis. He stated that the LRA developed the following goals for the reuse of the property:

1. Job creation
2. Tax ratable use
3. Compatibility with the neighborhood

Mr. Swiger stated that although the LRA desired a tax ratable project, a commercial or residential reuse could not be identified due to the smaller size of the parcel, the recession and other economic detriments. He stated that the parcel is too small for real estate development, as the site will only hold a limited number of single family or duplex homes. He added that many commercial uses would increase traffic in the area and would not fit with the low density residential character of the neighborhood.

## **NOI Presentations**

### **Berks Women in Crisis/Mary's Shelter**

**Cindy Roussel, representing BWIC**, noted that BWIC has operated from the same facility for 30 years. She stated that BWIC has outgrown the facility and has had to deny many women access and services.

**Andrea Lockhart** described the services she and her children received from BWIC. She also noted the unfair stigma BWIC has, as those who need services have become homeless due to domestic abuse. She explained the BWIC programs and requirements. She stated that if people accepted into the BWIC program do not meet or follow the requirements, they are disqualified from the program. She noted the combination of legal assistance, counseling, and education helps to ensure the recovery of the victim. She stated that she can understand the reservations of the community but noted BWIC's overall mission to empower women.

**Chris Folk, representing Mary's Shelter**, stated that her organization represents the second component of the NOI submitted to the Reading LRA. She explained that Mary's Shelter provides temporary housing for pregnant young women. Most young women seeking service are not being assisted by their family or the baby's father. BWIC and Mary's Shelter want to relocate both programs to this site. She described the requirements and life skills focus of the program. She distributed photographs of young women who have successfully moved through the Mary's Shelter program and described some of the success stories. She stated that the majority of the young women who use the program are relocated to the Oakbrook Housing Project. She stated that the lack of sufficient space at their current facility would be cured by moving to this site. The space available at this site would allow both Mary's Shelter and BWIC to expand their programs.

#### **Reading School District**

**Frank Vecchio, Assistant Superintendent**, noted the district's challenge to reduce the size of classrooms and schools to meet the current population trends. He stated that after approximately five to eight years, the population is finally leveling off. He described the past successful projects at Millmont and Glenside. He also noted the planned projects at the Citadel, the Jewish Community Center and Windsor and Ritter. He stated that Reading High School population is currently 4,700 students. He noted the severe difficulty of managing this population. He stated that the district hopes that reducing school sizes and classroom sizes will keep children better engaged and reduce the drop out rate. He stated that the district's mission statement is Small, Safe and Smart.

Mr. Vecchio stated that the district would use this site to hold kindergarten cottages, alternative education buildings and storage facilities. He explained that the alternative education program is for students who cannot manage in the regular classroom. He described the methods used to repatriate the students in the alternative education program. He also noted the new data showing the improvements in the test scores of all students in the district.

In response to a question from a citizen, Mr. Vecchio explained that students are tested frequently through the school year and that data supplied by the tests allows the district to assess the reading and math skills of the students and monitor their educational growth.

In response to a question from a citizen, Mr. Vecchio stated that this site would

allow the district to continue to build smaller schools and move students from the current over-crowded buildings, which will continue to improve the educational success rate of Reading students.

### **Reading Hospital and Medical Center**

**Mr. Mable, Senior Vice President Planning and Business Development at the Reading Hospital**, stated that the hospital originally wished to use the parcel for administrative building space. However, they now wish to use the site for dormitory space and educational space for students involved in the medical science program, due to its proximity to the school building located on Museum Road. He explained that the success of the medical science program has maxed out the hospital's existing housing and overflow students have been moved to the Inn at Reading. He stated that the hospital would demolish the existing facilities on the site and rebuild. The new facilities would match the appearance of the building located on Museum Road. The dormitory would house approximately 120 students.

### **Public Comment**

**David Martin, of Pershing Blvd**, encouraged the Reading LRA to give high consideration to the traffic issues that exist on Kenhorst Blvd. He described the dangerous intersection at Pershing and Kenhorst Blvd. He expressed the belief that the Reading School District does not properly manage the traffic flow around their existing buildings.

Mr. Swiger stated that traffic issues have been assessed by the consulting team.

**Sandy Graffius, of East Wyomissing Blvd**, asked BWIC and Mary's Shelter how many people would be housed at the facility. Ms. Folk stated that the current facility on South 12th Street holds 20 people. Ms. Bernosky, from BWIC, stated that they would like to house 50 people at the new site.

Ms. Graffius inquired if the Reading Hospital would begin new curriculum at the site. Mr. Mable stated that the site would provide space for dormitory use and the expansion of the current educational curriculum. Currently the overflow students are housed at the Inn at Reading, which creates parking issues as students tend to drive their personal vehicles from the Inn to the Reading Hospital.

Ms. Graffius questioned if the old alternative education program was located at

Millmont. Mr. Vecchio responded affirmatively. He stated that 125 alternative education students are in the facility on South 6th Street. He explained that alternative education facilities require classroom and intervention space. He stated that currently elementary schools educate students from kindergarten through 5th grade. Middle Schools educate students from 6th through 8th grade. The Citadel, due to open in November 2009, will educate 9th and 10th grade students. The high school will educate 11th and 12th grade students.

**Craig Bossler, of North 6th Street**, inquired if the district uses the CHORE building, located behind St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church. Mr. Spencer stated that the CHORE facility is used by the Children's Home.

Mr. Bossler inquired about the depth of the problems with the children in alternative education. Mr. Vecchio stated that children in this program have a variety of psychological issues, which are identified through various methods.

**Nancy Berry, of Pershing Blvd**, inquired how Mary's Shelter and BWIC are funded. Ms. Folk stated that Mary's Shelter, a private non-profit organization, receives 40% of its funding through the state and 60% from private donation/contribution through fundraising activities. Ms. Graffius questioned if Mary's Shelter funding will be reduced through state budget cuts. Ms. Folk stated that a reduction is not expected. She added that this organization has an annual external audit. Ms. Bernosky stated that BWIC is also a 501C3 and a large part of its funding package comes from the state and the Victim Crime Act (fines and penalties are used to support victims programs) at the federal level. BWIC also receives funding through pledges and fundraising. She stated that capital campaigns are used for building projects.

**Allen Bergman, of Kenhorst Blvd**, stated that he is a lifetime resident of this neighborhood and expressed the belief that alternative education programs and the type of shelters proposed by BWIC and Mary's Shelter will affect the neighborhoods safety and will have a detrimental effect on property values. Ms. Bernosky and Ms. Folk described the security measures used at their current facilities.

Mr. Bergman expressed the belief that the use proposed by the Reading Hospital would have a positive affect on the neighborhood. He stated that Reading Hospital has been a good neighbor for many years.

**Bob Kumpf, of Farr Place**, also expressed belief in the proposal by the Reading

Hospital. He stated that this is the only group with the financial resources to follow through with the proposed plan. He also noted the Reading Hospital's positive reputation with other building projects.

**Jay Mahoney, of Wyomissing**, expressed concern that the remediation and residential codes requirements may be difficult for Mary's Shelter and BWIC to overcome financially. He noted that while contamination has been identified, the entire levels of contamination are unknown. He expressed the belief that the demolition plan announced by Reading Hospital is the most economical way to address the variety of issues present. He expressed the belief that the educational uses proposed by the Reading School District would create unsafe traffic problems.

**Clarence Wilson, of Scott Street**, apologized for being late to open the church. He also expressed concern that the School District and BWIC-Mary's Shelter uses would create issues that would decrease property values. He noted the variety of problems created at school dismissal times such as fighting, littering, drug sales/use, etc.

**Julia Moses, of Museum Road**, stated that she focused on "stability and ability" when listening to the proposed uses. She stated that while she realizes the need for additional services to the homeless community, she believes this neighborhood is already overburdened. She stated that the increase in services and programs in this area have already affected the safety of the community. She expressed the belief that social services in the area are reaching a tipping point that will encourage current residents to leave the City. She noted her belief in the Reading Hospital's proposal.

**Ermete Rafaelli, of Joan Terrace**, stated that a school use can occur in every residential zoning district. He inquired why the Reading Hospital would step away from their original plan to place a dormitory next to the educational center on Museum Road. Mr. Mable replied that the Hospital was reluctant to build the dormitory on the parcel where the school is located as they believe the addition of a building on this parcel would harm the aesthetics of the site and harm the green space in the neighborhood. He noted that the hospital was also surprised with the quick growth of the educational program.

**Maria Ballas** asked the Swiger Consulting Team to explain the approval process for the reuse plan. Mr. Steinberg stated that the plan must comply with the federal regulations or it will not be accepted. He explained that the LRA could

reject all NOIs if they believe they do not meet the needs of the community. He stated that the recent down market makes economic development at this smaller parcel almost impossible. He reminded everyone that the Reading LRA obtained grant funding to hire the consulting team to assist in planning for the reuse of this site. He added that if the LRA selects a reuse that does not meet the federal government's standards, they could either auction the property or mothball it.

Mr. Steinberg stated that the homeless reuse must be considered. The Reading LRA cannot blindly reject the proposal. He also explained HUD's ability to reject the wrong type of homeless application.

**Phyllis Macbeth, of Rose Virginia Road**, questioned what the next steps are. Mr. Swiger stated that the Reading LRA will complete a reuse plan within the next 30-60 days. The draft plan will be presented to the community at a public hearing.

**John Reshetar, of Farr Road**, inquired if those submitting NOIs must provide estimates for the project. Mr. Swiger stated that estimates are not required, only ballpark figures and proof of the organizations ability to finance the project. Mr. Steinberg reminded everyone that there are some environmental and engineering issues with the property and that the federal government does not provide funding to cure any of those issues. The property is transferred "as is; where is".

Mr. Reshetar asked what happens if the organization who receives the parcel cannot follow through and complete the project as expected. Mr. Steinberg stated that the parcel would revert back to the federal government. The BRAC process could begin again or the federal government could either auction or mothball the building.

**A citizen** inquired if the consulting team and/or groups submitting NOIs reviewed the buildings maintenance records. Mr. Swiger stated that the maintenance reports were considered when developing the facilities assessment and those who submitted NOIs had access to the reports posted on the City's LRA website.

### **Comment Received Via E Mail**

-----Original Message-----

**From:** Stephanie Allen [mailto:scholarlymama@gmail.com]

**Sent:** Tuesday, June 09, 2009 10:38 PM  
**To:** Council  
**Subject:** Reuse of the Navy Marine Center

Good evening:

My name is **Stephanie Allen, and I live on Scott Street**, near the Navy Marine Center. I am unable to attend the public meeting on Thursday, but I wanted to give my opinion on how the building should be used when the Marines vacate the property next year. As a mother with two kids in the Reading School District, I feel it would be best for the building to be used for the benefit of the children of the school district, as the schools are quite overcrowded and many of them in less than great shape. For example, Thomas Ford Elementary School, where my daughter attends, is not air conditioned. This building could be used as an alternative school site.

I feel that using the facility as a Berks Women in Crisis facility is not in the best interests of a peaceful, residential community, and may be disruptive to the families that live here.

Thank you for allowing me to express my opinions on the subject.

Stephanie Allen

### **Next Steps**

Mr. Swiger stated that tonight's comments will be considered as the reuse plan is drafted. The comments will also be added to the report that will be submitted to HUD.

A citizen requested that those citizens present vote on the three proposals. Mr. Steinberg advised against a citizen vote; however, Mr. Fuhs stated that as he is the Councilor for this area, he would like to learn how the residents feel about the proposals.

Mr. Swiger asked all those who support the BWIC-Mary's Shelter proposal to raise their hands. Five citizens voted for this proposal.

Mr. Swiger asked all those who support the Reading School District to raise their hands. No citizens voted to support this proposal.

Mr. Swiger asked all those who support the Reading Hospital proposal to raise their hands. An overwhelming majority of citizens expressed support for this proposal.

Mr. Swiger asked all those who support some other use for the property to raise their hands. Five citizens raised their hands.

As no further business was brought forward, the Reading LRA meeting was adjourned.

*Respectfully submitted by  
Linda A. Kelleher CMC, City Clerk  
Ernest Swiger, Swiger Consulting Group*